

NSC BRIEFING

25 March 1959

State Dept. review completed

MIDDLE EAST

I. Nasir has stood firm in his argument with Moscow and Baghdad.

A. In face of patronizing chastisement by Khrushchev, who called him "a young man who is enthusiastic and rash," Nasir replied on 20 March that all the Arab people were enthusiastic and rash, and were it not for these qualities in the UAR "there would be there today, brethren, missile bases aimed against the Soviet Union....This is the enthusiasm and rashness with which Khrushchev shames us."

1. Nasir, in this context, also for first time publicly asserted that Soviet threats to the West had nothing to do with stopping the Anglo-French-Israeli attack on Suez.

a. Nasir's words: "When aggression against Egypt began October 29, 1956, brethren, we rose up to defend our country....There was no agreement between us and the Soviet Union....Until November 6...until the day of the cease-fire--we were alone....On November 6, the Russian warning appeared and the fighting was stopped on the same day, but we were fighting alone during the nine days and depending upon God and ourselves. (Cheers)We did not, brethren, during these days see any sign of assistance from any foreign state, including the Soviet Union...."

B. Other UAR propaganda devices also continue to blister the Arab Communists and the Iraqi regime--e.g., the ulemas (religious authorities) of the Al Azhar university in Cairo have denounced

"the instigators of chaos, destruction, and atheism in sister Iraq," and the Sheikh Al Azhar has declared a "holy jihad" against the "campaign of atheism and corruption."

- II. Qasim's media have until now answered Nasir's campaign in kind, telling him to keep his "big nose" out of Iraq and accusing him of "forsaking free Arab nationalism" for "the outworn Hitlerite theme of the fight against Communism."
- A. Qasim himself, however, in a press conference this week "advised" the Baghdad newspapers to avoid replying to Nasir's invective.
1. This tactic, whether or not followed by his press, is part of a general Iraqi strategy of seeking to place at Nasir's door any blame for breaking the unity of the Arab world. This parallels Moscow's line that Nasir's attacks "can be welcomed only by the imperialists."
- B. In somewhat more concrete moves, Qasim has sought to undercut Nasir's criticisms by announcing Iraq's formal withdrawal from the Baghdad Pact, 11 months before Pact's first five-year term is due to end.
- III. Moscow, has made no move thus far to interfere with economic or military assistance to the UAR.
- A. Ambassador Thompson believes that Soviet leaders are embarrassed by the extent to which the prospect of a Communist takeover in Iraq has become evident, and that they will endeavor to conceal the extent of Communist influence there while consolidating their position for the long pull. Thompson interprets private remarks of presidium member Kozlov on 16 March as indicating a belief by Soviet leaders that the Middle East will eventually

"go Communist," but that this will be a long process.

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V. The Soviets continuing pressures on Iran.

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A. Ambassador Pegov left Iran on 20 March

It is believed that he will not return to his post.

B. Yesterday in an official announcement the USSR attacked the bilateral defense pacts between the US and Iran, Turkey and Pakistan as a "hostile act, aimed not only at the USSR, but also at other Asian states."

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C. Direct propaganda attacks on the Shah and attempts to exploit popular discontent continuing.

D. In economic field, Moscow has discontinued lead ore purchases and has given no indication it intends to enter trade negotiations for renewal of current trade agreements which expire this month.

1. USSR normally takes major portion Iranian lead ore--about three million dollars annually.
2. Iranian attitude appears to be hardening. The Minister of Commerce issued formal ultimatum to the Soviet Trade Agency to indicate by 1 April its intention to enter trade talks or Iran will discontinue trade with the USSR.

VI. Two other developments of interest in Middle East:

A. Sudanese Mahdi died unexpectedly on Tuesday.

1. Political crisis in the Sudan continuing, and the position of the relatively pro-Western Umma party, which depended on the Mahdi's Ansar tribesmen for its mass support, is likely to be weakened.
2. Mahdi had been in poor health for some time; no indication of foul play. His successor will be his son, 48-year-old Siddiq al-Mahdi, who also has political ambitions.

B.

Libyan Prime Minister has tape-recorded radio address announcing that King contemplates abdication in favor of Crown Prince shortly after Prince's wedding 3 April.

1. Prime Minister reportedly states King will instruct Prince in ^Rapt of rule and will step aside if Prince proves apt.
2. If carried out, abdication will result in peaceful transition and assure friendly Libyan attitude to U.S.

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